

CREDIBILITY FACTORS IN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS’ VERSUS USER-CREATED BLOGS

An Honors Fellows Thesis

by

KAITLYN SHEA DRINKWATER

Submitted to the Honors Programs Office
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as
HONORS UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOW

April 2010

Major: University Studies - Honors

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Approved by:

Research Advisor:

Associate Director of the Honors Programs Office:

Randall Sumpter

Dave A. Louis

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ABSTRACT

Credibility Factors in Professional Journalists' versus User-created Blogs. (April 2010)

Kaitlyn Shea Drinkwater
Department of University Studies - Honors, Science
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Randall Sumpter
Department of Communication

During the past decade the professional news industry has continued to lose ground to citizen journalists and other alternative forms of news in the war for credibility and readers. At the same time, the Internet has exploded and many people get most or all of their news online. The rapid growth and ease of access to information online makes it critical that we gain an understanding of what creates credibility online. In this study I use four credibility factors established by recent research in this new medium to do a manifest content analysis of blogs. The findings of these factors may be used more in user-generated (a generic term for online content created by regular people) blogs than those maintained by professional journalists. This may explain why, even when employing a popular medium, professional journalists are rated less credible than non-professionals. The analysis of credibility factors merits further study in the field of credibility research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe many, extended ‘thank-you’s to my research advisor, Dr. Randall Sumpter, for agreeing to be a part of this on very short notice and for walking me through the process step by step. Without his patience and endurance I wouldn’t have known where to begin and this never would have come together. Thank you to Mrs. Cheri Shipman, the advisor at *The Battalion* student newspaper, and the rest of the crew at *The Batt* for the invaluable experience I gained working there. Finally, thanks to my parents, for everything.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many people now get most of their news online. The days of reading a physical daily paper over morning coffee are numbered. The internet surpassed newspapers as the main source of news in December of 2008. As of July 2009 42% of people get most of their national and international news online compared to 33% for newspapers (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2009). As papers move their content online, they have encountered the problem of blogs. Blogs, slang for weblogs, are journals kept online by individuals or organizations. They are typically themed around a particular topic and updated weekly, if not daily. Some blogs cover topics which are normally the domain of journalists, such as politics, sports, and breaking news. Twenty-three percent of Americans regularly or sometimes read political or current event blogs (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008). The problem, so far as journalists are concerned, is that these blogs are consistently rated as more trustworthy and credible than the articles and blogs published by news organizations. In a 2004 study almost 75% of those surveyed reported blogs to be moderately to very credible on a credibility index rating believability, accuracy, fairness, and depth of information; newspapers earned a meager 46.5% on that same item (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). In 2008 a similar study scored news sources on a credibility scale from 4-20. Blogs were rated the most credible

This thesis follows the style of *Developmental Psychology*.

at 12.2; online and traditional newspapers both scored 11.2 (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2008).

Professional journalists are assumed to subscribe to a formalized journalistic code of ethics in their researching and reporting practices (Society of Professional Journalists, 2006), a safeguard notably absent from amateur journalism as it is conducted on the internet. An ethical obligation to report only the verified, complete truth has long been believed by news professionals to be a staple component of credibility (Robinson, 2006). Many researchers feel it's important to study web credibility, commonly defined as people's impressions of a communication's believability, because in the past there were filter and control mechanisms to fact check the flow of information, both through the constraints of journalistic integrity and due to the relatively small number of news outlets. As noted by Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, and McCann in their 2003 review of credibility literature including over 150 studies from the 1960s through the present, today this role is in the hands of the consumer.

A search of the Communication & Mass Media database for the subject term "blog" in scholarly journals revealed 342 articles, the earliest of which dated from 2000. Only 12 of the articles were published before 2005, nearly half were published in 2008 or 2009. This is an active area of research with studies being pursued in many fields besides credibility but little of the research is conclusive, possibly because the medium is so young.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Credibility in the research literature

Journalism textbooks say little about credibility, and they don't necessarily agree on what they say. They may not even cover the credibility factors that readers are looking for and the non-empirical "craft knowledge" in textbooks isn't very helpful in conceptualizing credibility. How news professionals viewed and used credibility has changed over time, perhaps to accommodate audience reading habits (Harris, 2008). Blog readership habits today are more equal to an earlier era in American newspapers when most people read several newspapers every day to get different angles on a story (Hachten, 2005), indicating that it is time to once again reevaluate ideas of what creates credibility.

Only the most basic, high-school level journalism textbooks even attempt to provide a clear definition of credibility. When college level and professional books do mention credibility it is generally as an assumed consequence of objectivity or journalistic standards with very little explanation as to why. A search of five journalistic trade publications on the Communication and Mass Media database shows they aren't much better. There were only 53 articles referencing credibility dating from 1995 through 2009. No articles list credibility as a subject term and the ones that mention it in the text exhort the perceived benefits of one journalistic practice or another without ever going to

readers to actually see what they think. One article ironically recognized the credibility crisis, stating “If the public does not trust or believe what it reads or hears on the news, then we as journalists are finished,” (Aeikens, 2009, p.3) and then proceeded to suggest solving the issue by educating the public on what they *should* believe creates credibility: journalism’s traditional ethical practices.

Credibility is a judgment which exists in the mind of a perceiver concerning the believability of a communication (Metzger et al., 2003). There is a lot of overlap between the fields of persuasion and credibility research; some of the most useful definitions for credibility research have come from researchers primarily studying persuasion (Metzger et al., 2003). Historically, research on credibility has been divided into three fields: source, message and medium credibility. The goal was to measure each component independently of the others, but this was never entirely achieved. Source credibility, or the credibility attributed to a particular speaker regardless of his or her message or how it is conveyed, is the most thoroughly studied. It has been found to be based primarily on the dimensions of expertise and trustworthiness (Metzger et al., 2003). Expertise comes from a communicator’s perceived qualifications or ability to know the truth about a topic, and trustworthiness is based on perceptions of a communicator’s motivation to tell the truth about a topic. The study of medium credibility has revealed a pattern wherein new methods of presentation are initially mistrusted but then surpass older forms (Metzger et al., 2003). Television surpassed newspapers in 1961 and has remained ahead ever since in credibility research polls

(Metzger et al., 2003). Commonly these polls ask people to rate the mediums on believability, accuracy, fairness, and depth of information. The internet is now rated more credible than either print or broadcast journalism (Johnson et al., 2008). Relatively little research has been done on message credibility; what there is shows that message quality – how well written and interesting readers perceive it to be - is the primary predictor of credibility (Metzger et al., 2003). Researchers have rarely measured the credibility factors of messages themselves. All the research on these three fields of credibility must be taken with a grain of salt because researchers have never been very successful at measuring them separately (Metzger et al., 2003).

The primary issue for researchers is how to divide and define credibility. There are the three historical concepts: speaker, message, and medium. Each of these is a measurement of what the audience finds credible (what the audience finds credible in a speaker, what the audience finds credible in a message, etc.). Audience credibility is a term which some books use generally to describe what factors lead the audience to find a communication believable as a whole. Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, and Ranly (2002) stated that for the audience credibility is tied to accurate presentation of quoted material. Additionally, some journalism textbooks mention source credibility, by which they mean what a source finds credible in a reporter who interviews him (Brooks et al., 2002). Researchers inevitably chooses a definition of credibility that applies either to the writer or the audience and assumes that it works for both when in fact the two groups judge using completely different sets of standards.

Most journalism textbooks focus on “craft knowledge,” or creator message credibility which consists of aspects that news professionals add or subtract from a story because they believe those actions will improve credibility. For example, anonymous sources are prohibited because of an expected negative correlation with credibility (Rich, 1997). This is something that has been shown to be untrue (Smith, 2007). Readers simply don’t care whether a statement is attributed to someone with a name or not. The debate on anonymous sources is indicative of the larger problem. One book noted this, saying insightfully that there may be a gap between readers’ and editors’ estimations of credibility and that the gap “may exist in part because readers often don’t agree with editors on what is important” (Metz, 1991, p. 9).

Recent research has shown that objectivity, or the removal of personal bias and influence in the quest for the absolute truth (Robinson, 2006), is one thing the newspaper industry highly values which is not rated as very important by readers (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). There are several theories about when the idea that objectivity equals credibility entered journalism. One notes that in the early 1800s newspapers were anything but objective. Most people read more than one paper a day, so they could balance various interpretations of stories. Newspapers took on the personalities of their editors, and people enjoyed that (Hachten, 2005). As times changed and smaller newspapers began to merge into large ones. Papers served more varied audiences and most people read only one a day, so papers became more objective to serve a larger group of people. The standard of objectivity – the practice of striving for a fair and unbiased perspective – has

worked fairly well for the past several decades; however, the reading habits of today's blog consumers (Harris, 2008) are similar to the newspaper readership habits of that earlier century. This may explain why audience credibility online is shifting away from current professional perceptions of credibility.

In this paper credibility is defined as judgments made by a perceiver about the believability of a communication. This conceptualization is based on a definition for source credibility which was first used in the early 20th century by researchers studying persuasive speaking (Metzger et al., 2003). These researchers were focused on the speaker (the source) which is the dimension of credibility that has been the most successfully studied (Metzger et al., 2003). This definition is appropriate for this study because it is audience-focused. It is the audience who determines the fate of an information producer by their willingness to read and believe what it says; if newspapers are unable to meet the credibility standards of their audience then what they say is of no consequence.

Blog-related concepts

Efforts to apply historical credibility research done with traditional communication mediums to this new field have been only mildly successful, mostly because of the unique challenges posed by the online medium (Metzger et al. 2003). It is so difficult to separate medium, message, and speaker dimensions due to the inherent anonymity and interconnectedness of the internet that most researchers generalize their assessments to

measure simply audience perception of credibility. Traditional research has historically found that speaker credibility is based on trustworthiness and expertise, which are usually measured using audience surveys (Metzger et al., 2003). Credibility polls suggest that blogs are striking the right balance between the two. Presumably newspapers are falling behind because they are high on expertise, but lack trustworthiness. There is disagreement among researchers about whether trustworthiness or expertise is more important to readers in assessing credibility (Metzger et al., 2003). However, currently public trust in the press is low (Pew, 2009), and the internet allows the average blogger access to many of the same documents and resources as professional journalists, lending expertise to the bloggers.

A blog is a website maintained by an individual or small group of individuals that updates regularly with information displayed in a reverse chronological format. Although the term “blog” wasn’t coined until 1997 the blog-form of online publication began in 1994 (Wortham, 2007). The first blogs were simply personal journals or diaries of their writers (Harmanci, 2005) and later evolved to include topic-focused varieties common now. Professional journalists first began to use blogs sometime around 2000, but only used them to reprint stories from the paper and hyperlink within their own site (Robinson, 2006).

User-created blogs are those written by end-users of media, that is, those who would normally be reading the news, not producing it as a professional reporter. User-created

content is created outside of the context of job duties and must display some creative effort (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007). In an effort to regain the attention and trust of online readers, newspaper managers have embraced the blogging medium (Schultz & Sheffer, 2009) and begun asking their writers to venture into the world of online blogging as professional bloggers. Unfortunately for professional journalism, the journalists themselves are by and large staunchly opposed to this change (Schultz & Sheffer, 2007). One veteran journalist said:

It's the worst kind of insidious, stupid-creep to have ever infected our profession. Blogging blurs the lines between journalism and pajama-wearing nitwits sitting in their mothers' basements firing off bile-filled opinions. Newspaper editors and managers sit around at meetings and wonder why their circulation is falling and they have themselves to blame for lowering all of us into the foul-smelling muck of the blogworld. (Schultz & Scheffer, 2007, p. 71)

Because of the conservative nature of journalism, where the very production of a story reinforces beliefs in the value of the established process, it is not surprising that reporters so strongly resist change (Robinson, 2006). Reporters often repurpose print content instead of exploring the interactivity, open style that defines blogging (Schultz, 2000). Interactivity in communication means that the communication roles can be reversed so that the listener becomes the speaker (Schultz, 2000) and open style is characterized by open mindedness to contradictory views, candor, and quick admission of mistakes (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Robinson (2006) found that even when reporters actively

and willingly engage in blogging they use it as a means to reinforce and defend traditional journalistic values even as they participate in the morphing of those values through the blog. By doing this they place themselves firmly on the opposite end of the blogging continuum from user-created blogs (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008) and as far as possible from the cutting edge of online journalism (Willey, 2005).

Credibility factors for blogs

Although persuasion literature yields the best definitions to study credibility as a concept, the factors that indicate credibility vary from medium to medium (Abdulla, Garrison, Salwen, Driscoll, & Denise Casey, 2002.) Because traditional credibility factors are of limited use online (Metzger et al., 2003) and craft knowledge perceptions of what readers should find credible are off base (Smith, 2007; Siff, Hrach, & Alost, 2008) new credibility factors must be found within the limited research which has been conducted specifically with the online medium. There is substantial research to show that reliance, or the extent to which a person uses a source, heavily predicts credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004). However, there is comparatively little research on which specific features of the message may initially engage readers' trust. This study employs four credibility factors selected from modern studies of credibility that looked specifically at blogs. Those factors are timeliness, self-disclosure, information-disclosure, and transparency.

One study that looked for credibility factors for television, newspaper, and online news found that timeliness (or currency) was a common factor for all three (Abdulla et al., 2002). The immediate nature of the internet allows bloggers and readers to interact in real-time. For reporting “immediacy translates into readers” (Parry, 2010, p. A12). Following particularly successful moment-by-moment coverage of a protest on a college campus one user-generated news blog quickly shot past its professional competition with 200,000 page views on its site (Parry, 2010). Not only can bloggers post at any time, readers can make comments in return and the blogger may respond to them, creating a conversational atmosphere which builds trust.

Another study examined the effects of self-disclosure by the author in the form of photos or information about their life (Johnson & Wiedenbeck, 2009). They found that information about the writer(s) made an online news story significantly more credible to readers. Van House (2004), also, found that bloggers engage in high levels of self-disclosure, which has been shown to build trust.

Revealing sources is information-disclosure, the next credibility factor. In online news articles it is most often accomplished through the use of hyperlinks (Robinson, 2006). Hyperlinks are underlined sections of text which when clicked on take the reader directly to a connected page. Like in a printed paper the reader is given information as to the origin of information, however online they are able to take it one step further by immediately viewing that source and confirming its veracity for themselves. The effect

of hyperlinks on credibility was examined in the same study as self-disclosure. Johnson and Wiedenbeck (2009) found that these hyperlinks had a significant effect on credibility. Although hyperlinks are the most convenient way to link readers to sources they are not the only way. As long as readers are properly informed with the names, dates, locations, etc. of sources they can find them for themselves easily enough.

The last online credibility factor compared in this study is transparency. Bloggers show transparency about their creation process to readers, from information gathering to post production (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Transparency is a key step in trust-building (Mitchell & Stelle, 2005). “Transparency is the new objectivity,” said one successful non-journalist news blogger (Parry, 2010, p. A12). Transparency is a broad term. It sometimes encompasses information-disclosure and self-disclosure but applies specifically to the publication process as a whole (MacKinnon, 2005). It means allowing public access to the private workings of a blog or news organization. While it is not specifically forbidden in journalism, it is simply not highly valued and rarely considered (MacKinnon, 2005).

Bringing the reader into a conversation with the author seems to be the theme of successful news blogging, as self-disclosure, information-disclosure, and transparency all demystify the news-producing process and encourage well-informed opinions and discussion.

A fifth factor of interest, bias, will be measured in order to compare it with the others. If it correlates positively with the four established credibility factors it should be studied more extensively because it may be a contributor to credibility and not a detractor as previously thought. Bias is often talked about as a detriment to credibility (Metzger et al., 2003). However, recent studies have begun to show less of a negative effect from slant or lack of balance. One found that the presence of fairness, in particular, was rated low in blogs, despite their credibility remaining high (Johnson & Kaye, 2004), leaving researchers to speculate as to why this feature may be contributing to instead of sabotaging credibility. Johnson suggests “bias is likely seen as a virtue by blog users” (p. 633) possibly because readers are more interested in information that supports their own opinions or because readers consider frank disclosure of biases more honest than pretending or attempting to have none (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). For their part, readers said they are attracted by personal and opinionated writing styles and cited blogs’ in-depth, thoughtful analyses as an important feature not available in traditional media (Johnson et al., 2008).

It is known that reliance is the strongest predictor of online credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004), but further research is needed to identify and prioritize all of the specific factors that cause readers to come to rely on sources to begin with so that they can gain the all-important reliance.

This review of the literature suggests several research questions:

1. Do user-created blogs contain more credibility factors per word count and per post than those generated by professional journalists?
2. What is the frequency rank order for each credibility factor in user-created blogs? In professional journalist generated blogs?
3. Does a comparison of these rank orders indicate that some of the credibility factors should be investigated further?
4. Is there a positive correlation among bias and the credibility factors? Does bias correlate positively with the credibility factors?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Efforts to systematically study blogs are fraught with method issues (Li & Walejko, 2008). Many blogs have very short life spans, while others are filled with only advertisements and some are viewable to only a handful of people (Li & Walejko). The primary effect of this is to make sampling blogs very difficult and replicating studies even harder (Li & Walejko). Sites called blog aggregators are often used to gain a “random” sampling of blogs; however, they all have their limits. Some show only blogs which have updated recently; others serve only a certain geographic area or topic of interest, and they’re all polluted with spam blogs and other non-traditional blogs which are not of interest to most researchers (Li & Walejko). The constant and rapid shift in demographics and expertise among internet users, as well as the fluid nature of online content itself, cause studies and theories pertaining to the online medium to quickly become outdated and can seriously limit the usefulness of research done relatively recently, depending on the topic of interest (Lehman-Wilzig & Cohen-Avigdor, 2005).

This exploratory study uses a snapshot of bloggers’ entries over the course of January 25-31, 2010, on the top five news items of that week as ranked by a Pew news poll (PEJ News Coverage Index: January 25-31, 2010). The top five news topics were ranked based on “news hole” or the amount of space – inches of print and minutes of airtime - devoted to covering them in the mainstream media. The Pew study includes over 1,000

articles from 52 news outlets representing print, online, network TV, cable, and radio journalism (PEJ News Coverage Index: January 25-31, 2010). Where time does not permit coding an entire newspaper or broadcast the PEJ coding team of 16 individuals code the front page or the first 30 minutes in order to focus on the biggest news stories (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). They choose sources which are widely viewed according to internal and independent measurements for coding and adjust the number of stories coded from each source based on the number of people who get their news from that source so that they can reach conclusions about which news stories most Americans are seeing every day. They also weigh the news outlets differently based on surveys of news consumption. For 2010 online news is weighted the most, followed by cable news, newspapers, network news, and radio (Project for Excellence in Journalism).

This week was chosen because there were several big news events during and directly before it, including the State of the Union address and the earthquake in Haiti. The topics were, in descending order of coverage: State of the Union (19% of news hole), Economic Crisis (18%), Haiti Earthquake (11%), Obama Admin (7%), and Toyota Recall (4%). To gather the samples I searched for each news item individually in the LexisNexis Academic database searching only blogs for the week of interest. I selected blogs beginning at the top of the list generated by the search engine which sorts automatically by relevance. I kept moving down the list selecting the blogs until I had three professional and three user-generated blogs for each news topic. I used the Google search engine to find each post at its original URL so that I could code it more

accurately. I manually examined each blog post and rejected spam blogs and other types of non-traditional blogs, selecting only those which met my definition of a blog as a website maintained by an individual or small group of individuals that updates regularly with information displayed in a reverse chronological format. I also skipped those that weren't pertinent to the topic of interest or contained less than 100 words of original content because these did not provide enough material to assess the author's use of credibility factors. User generated blogs were those maintained outside of work duties and not affiliated with a mainstream news organization. Professionally created blogs were those maintained by a professional journalist and hosted on a mainstream newspaper's website.

It was often difficult to classify the blog entries as simply professional journalists' blogs or user generated. Many non-mainstream news organizations have websites that look as official as a print newspaper's site while many mainstream newspapers strive to make their sites look more like the non-traditional news sites. Additionally, many journalists maintain a personal blog outside of work. As long as they produce new content for the non-work-affiliated blog it is user-generated content, but this can be difficult to assess. I used the Google search engine to determine if the same post also appeared on their newspaper's website. Some newspapers host blogs which are not written by newspaper staff, such as blogs of letters to the editor or guest blogs written by prominent local figures. These were determined to be neither user- or professionally generated for purposes of this study. Because they were written by citizens but edited by newspaper

staff there was no way to attribute the credibility factors to one or the other. There was also an obvious third category of bloggers which was not of interest for this study formed by those blogs which were hosted by companies or freelance news organizations other than mainstream newspapers – meaning they were not professional journalists’ blogs – but posters were paid for their entries – making it part of their work duties and therefore not user generated.

Before coding the main sample, I tested my code sheet and coding procedures for reliability by coding a set of six blog entries, three professional and three user-generated. I coded these blogs, which were not included in the formal study, twice, the second time after a one day wait. My intracoder reliability percentages were 99% for word count, 100% for transparency, 100% for timeliness, 90% for self-disclosure, 86% for information disclosure, and 87% for bias. The slight variation in word count resulted from a small difference in how much miscellaneous text was included at the end of an entry. After noting this difference in the small coding sample a decision rule was created that the word count for the main body of the entry would extend from the title through the end of the original text. If the author’s name and the posting timestamp were placed at the end of the entry the word count would include them but would not go further. This was the best way to consistently include all the data I was interested in and as little extra as possible.

After conducting the intracoder reliability test I drew my full sample (see appendix B)

The sampling method described above gave me 30 blog entries broken into five groups by topic, each group was half professional and half user generated. I then coded the entries using the guidelines in the code book (see appendix A). Each instance of timeliness, self-disclosure, information-disclosure, or transparency by the author was counted and recorded on a code sheet. Quotes or excerpts which were not original to the author were not coded because they did not reflect the author's use of credibility factors. When instances of transparency, self-disclosure, or bias were in list or table format each table or list was counted once. The small sample coded for the intracoder reliability test made it apparent that this was necessary because it was impractical to count so many items, and it inaccurately inflated the statistics. For instance, in one blog entry there were several lists of personal facts. One such list of movies would add six instances of self-disclosure if they were counted individually.

Favorite Movies:

- Casablanca
- All the President's Men
- To Sir With Love
- the 1957 Teacher's Pet
- anything with Spencer Tracy
- Katharine Hepburn or Sidney Poitier (Turner, 2010)

The same blog contained many similar lists as well as many tables depicting site statistics. In the case of this blog entry, counting tables and lists as wholes instead of each discrete entry made the difference between hundreds of instances of self-disclosure

and transparency and 43 instances.

The instances of bias, the word count, publication date, access date, and hyper link were also noted on the code sheet. I was interested in all the content generated by the author on the post of interest, including comments made by the blog author and updates, within two days of the original posting date. The two-day time period was chosen in the interest of timeliness and selecting for content that was relevant to the original post. Before conducting this study I observed blogging behaviors and determined that this time period allows most of the pertinent activity that will occur on that post to pass. After two days most blog authors will have made another post and activity will shift to it, causing activity on the previous post to slow.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This exploratory study found that user-generated blogs contained more credibility factors in each category than the professionally-generated ones. Most significantly, they contained far more instances of transparency as a percentage of word count than the professionally-generated blogs. Some differences were recorded that may have been due to the type of event discussed in a blog. Professionally-generated blogs used more credibility factors to discuss the “State of the Union” while user-generated blogs used fewer. Professionally-generated blogs used fewer factors when addressing the “Economic Crisis.” Both types of blogs devoted the most words to “Haiti Earthquake” and significantly fewer to “State of the Union,” the leading news story in the mainstream press for the week. There were no significant correlations between bias and the credibility factors.

User-created blogs contained more credibility factors per word count and per entry than those generated by professional journalists. The user-generated blogs contained more instances per entry of every credibility factor (see figure 1). On average they contained over twice as many total credibility factors per entry (14.2 versus 5.67) than the professionally-generated blogs.

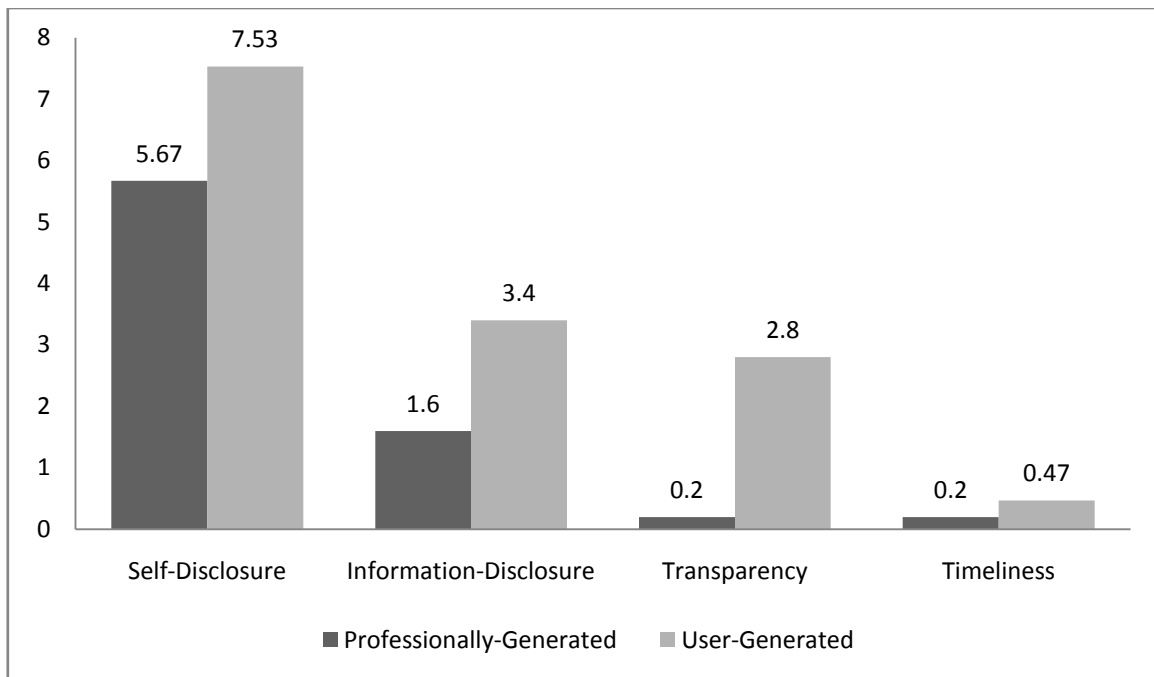


Figure 1. Average Frequency per Entry of Credibility Factors.

The user-generated blogs were almost twice as long on average (588.73 words versus 308.93) as the professionally-generated blogs. When the credibility factor averages were calculated as a percentage of word count the user-generated blogs had higher percentages. This calculation involved dividing the average instances per entry of each credibility factor by the average word count of that type of blog and multiplying by 100. On average the professionally-generated blogs had 1.84% and the user-generated blogs had 2.41% credibility factors as a percentage of word count. Essentially, that means that if each instance of a credibility factor were represented by one word, 1.84% of the words in an average entry in a professionally-generated blog would be credibility factors.

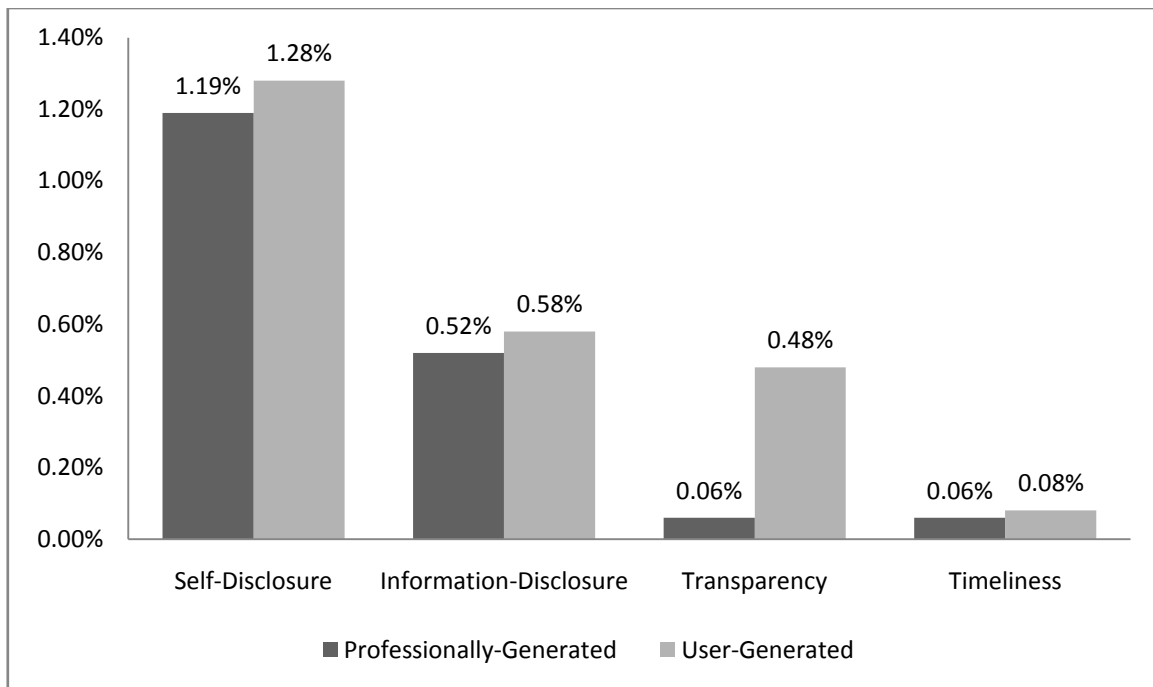


Figure 2. Average Frequency of Credibility Factors as a Percentage of Word Count.

For both groups of blogs the frequency rank order of the credibility factors was the same. They ranked from most common to least: self-disclosure, information-disclosure, transparency, and timeliness (the professionally-generated blogs had the same frequencies for transparency and timeliness) (see figures 1 and 2). After adjusting for word count the frequencies were separated by less than a tenth of a percentage point, with the exception of transparency at nearly half a percentage point. From least to greatest, the gaps between user- and professionally-generated blog frequencies were timeliness (.02%), information-disclosure (.06%), self-disclosure (.09%), and transparency (.42%).

Because the blogs were broken into five subgroups by topic I was able to look for any effect from topic of the entry. For both groups the most credibility factors per entry were used to talk about “Haiti Earthquake” (professionally-generated entries had the same amount for “Haiti Earthquake” and “Obama Administration”) (see figure 3).

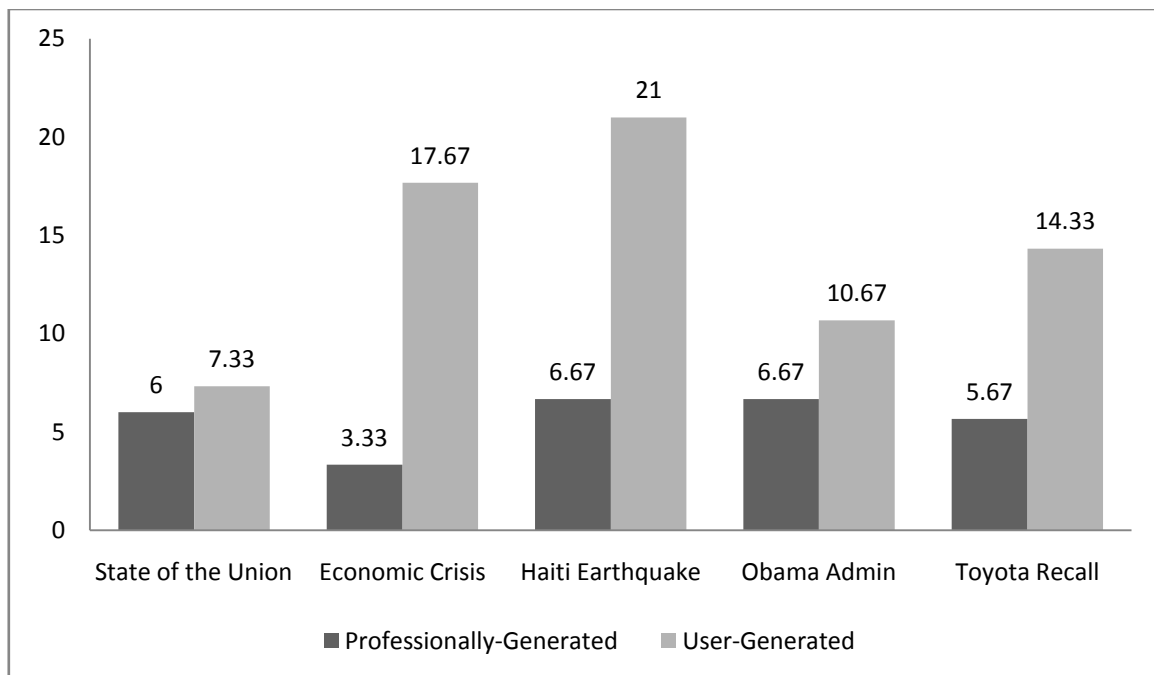


Figure 3. Average Frequency of Total Credibility Factors per Entry by Topic.

The credibility factors were once again divided into word count to adjust for the length variable. When this was done it was clear that the “State of the Union” and “Economic Crisis” entries were unusual (see figure 4). The professionally-generated blogs used more credibility factors than normal when talking about “State of the Union” while user-generated blogs used fewer. It is the only topic for which the professionally-generated blogs exceeded the user-generated ones in their use of credibility factors (as a percentage

of word count). In the “Economic Crisis” entries the user-generated blogs did not use an unusual number of credibility factors but professionally-generated blogs used fewer than usual.

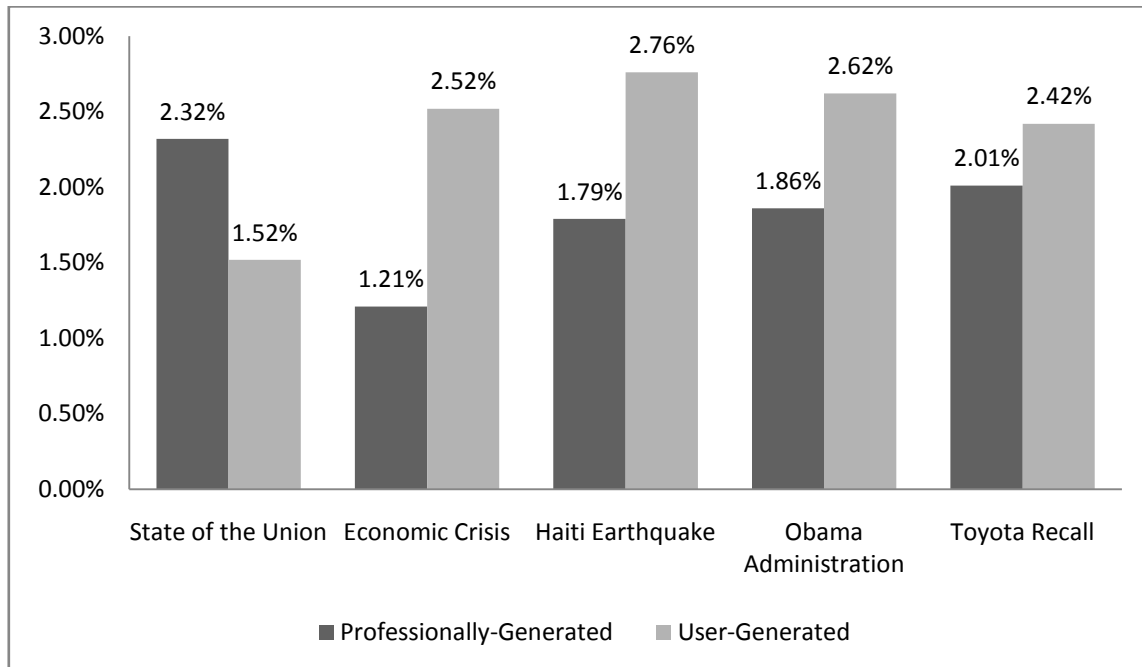


Figure 4. Average Frequency of Total Credibility Factors as a Percentage of Word Count by Topic.

When comparing the word counts devoted to the five topics, both types of blogs were similar in the relative number of words per topic (see figure 5). With the exception of the topic of “Obama Administration” for user-generated blogs, both types have a curved word count trend with a peak in the middle for “Haiti Earthquake.” It is important to remember that these news topics are ordered from left to right according to the amount of “news hole” devoted to their coverage in the mainstream press during this week.

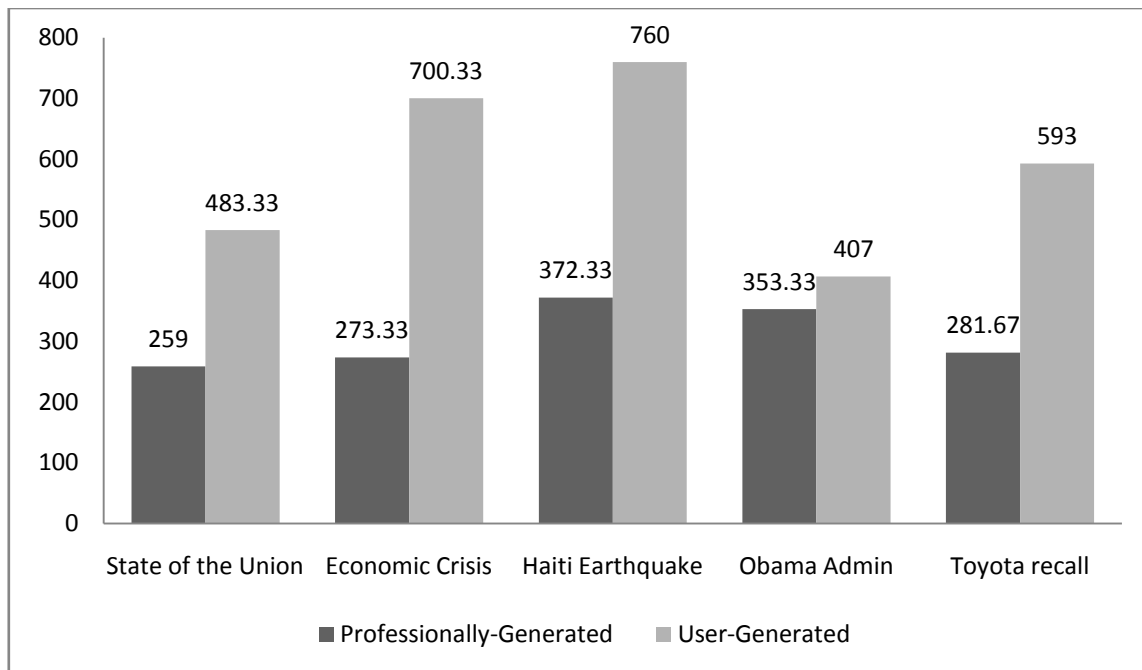


Figure 5. Average Word Count for Professionally- and User-generated Blogs by Topic.

Pearson's Linear Regression was used to calculate r for the data points gathered from the 30 blogs in the study. The r value for all the blogs together was -0.055, meaning there was no significant correlation between bias and credibility factors (see figure 6). It is important to note that one of the basic assumptions for using Pearson's Linear Regression, random sampling, was violated by this study. The calculation of this statistic was purely for the sake of comparison.

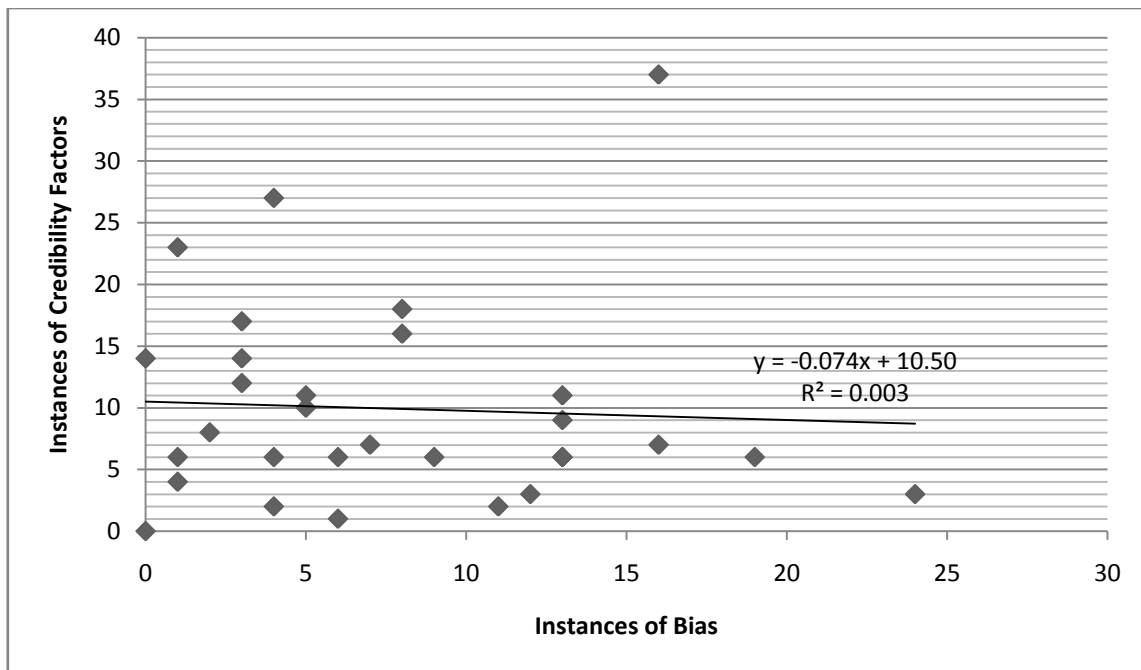


Figure 6. Correlation of Bias with Credibility Factors for All Blogs.

When the two data sets were split by blog type they showed markedly different trends.

The professionally-generated blogs had an r value of 0.210 and the user-generated blogs had an r value of -0.230 (see figures 7 and 8). Still, neither showed a significant correlation.

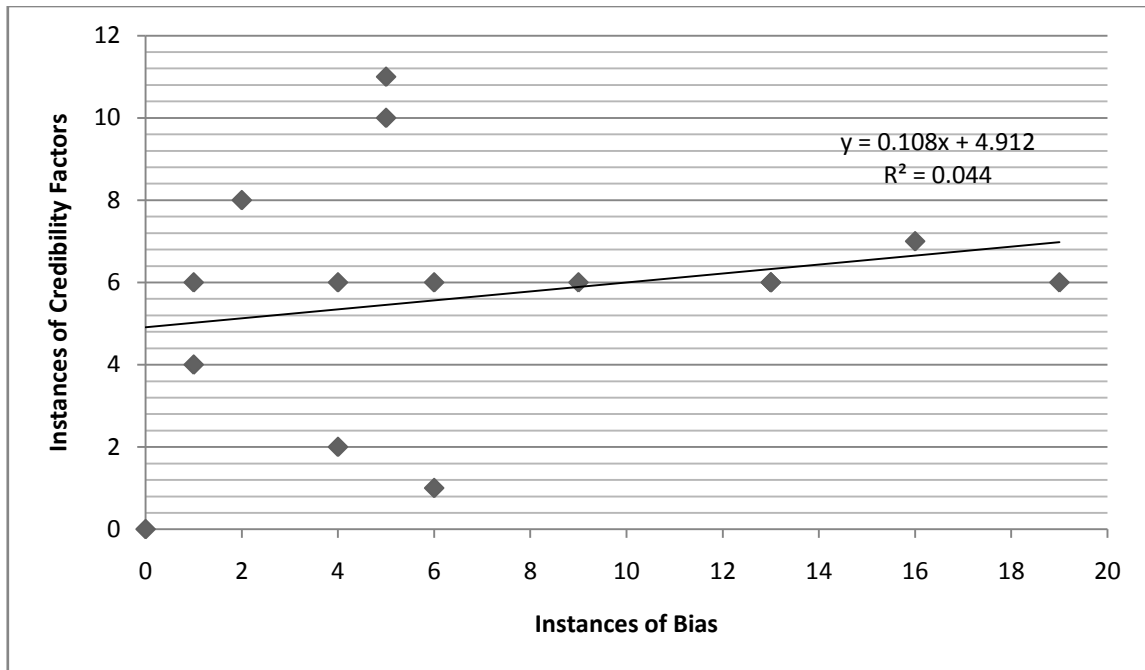


Figure 7. Correlation of Bias with Credibility Factors for Professionally-generated Blogs.

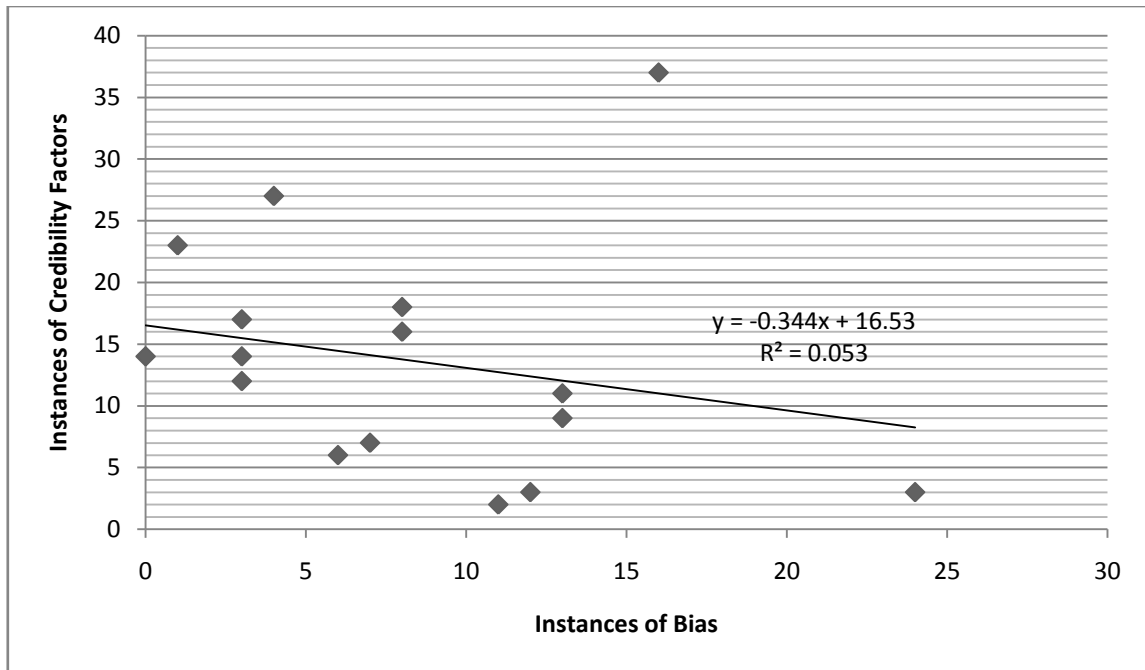


Figure 8. Correlation of Bias with Credibility Factors for User-generated Blogs.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Due to the limitations of this analysis the results cannot be generalized; however, they show trends that future research should fully explore. The user-generated entries had over twice as many credibility factors per entry as the professionally-generated ones. Once the user-generated entries longer word count was adjusted for by dividing total credibility factor instances into word count they contained over 150% as many credibility factors. If a more extensive analysis of blogs replicates the trends found in this exploratory study then studies should be done to determine to what extent the use of credibility factors may be responsible for the credibility gap between professionally- and user-generated blogs.

For both kinds of blogs the most common credibility factor by far was self-disclosure, followed by information-disclosure, transparency, and timeliness. There are two possible explanations for the rank order being the same for both types of blogs. Either some artifact of the medium, like ease of use, dictated the order, or it shows that both groups value the factors in the same order even though they employ them to different levels. While it is impossible to determine which is the predominate cause I would suggest that it is primarily an artifact of the medium. Throughout the discussion I will elaborate on the point of how the nature of blogging makes some factors easier to use than others, but briefly: self-disclosure in the form of profile pages yields (often) a great deal of

information which only has to be created once and is subsequently linked to every post; information-disclosure is most often in the form of hyperlinks which are not only easy to insert but almost required online; transparency comes most often in the form of free, easy to get site meters that gather site statistics; and timeliness comes in the form of updating posts and replying to readers' comments, both of which are highly encouraged by internet etiquette but often fall by the wayside in favor of an entirely new post.

It may seem odd that professional journalists, who are ingrained with the value of objectivity, would interject self-disclosure into their blog posts, but several things must be taken into account. For both groups, most of the self-disclosure occurred in the form of biographical author pages called "profile pages". Most blogging platforms (the site that hosts the blog) come with some form of profile built in. While not technically a requirement for a blog, they are so common as to be almost mandatory. Although both groups shared almost equal amounts of information, there was a fundamental difference between the profile pages on the professionally-generated blogs and those on the user-generated blogs. Those of the journalists tended to be professional and dry, mostly detailing career and education information. Where a user-generated blog's profile might include quirky hobbies, pets names, favorite movies, etc., the professionally-generated ones typically included, at their most personal, a single mention of a wife (or husband) and kids. The way self-disclosure was operationalized in this study covered both the very personal and very impersonal profile pages and did not distinguish between the two. Future studies should attempt to identify if readers judge credibility any differently

when the profile page is more personal versus more professional and should design more sensitive coding methods to differentiate the two.

One of the most unexpected findings in this study was the near absence of transparency and timeliness from professionally-generated blogs. Although these two factors were the least used in user-generated entries as well, transparency in particular occurred at a much higher frequency in the user-generated entries. When journalists' attitudes toward blogging are taken into account, along with the nature of blogging, the (relatively) high levels of self- and information-disclosure and low levels of transparency and timeliness are understandable. As mentioned before, most of the self-disclosure occurred in the form of profile pages which, once established, are linked to every post and never have to be recreated. Once created these pages require no maintenance and provide "bonus" credibility factors, independent of the topical content of an entry. The information-disclosure was almost always in the form of hyperlinks. The use of hyperlinks to connect readers to other pages is such standard practice that it is almost mandatory online. Additionally, information-disclosure in the form of naming sources is well established and entrenched in journalistic values. Both of these credibility factors could be attained, with no additional effort by the journalist, simply by copying and pasting a news story that ran in the online version of the newspaper into their blog. Although only one-third of the professionally-generated entries appeared to be print content reposted, verbatim, it seems that the journalists were unlikely to employ credibility factors not reinforced by their journalistic values. Although neither transparency nor timeliness (as they were

defined in this study) is specifically forbidden in journalism, they are not highly valued and their implementation would require extra effort on the part of the writer.

One might wonder what the point is in reposting content that already appears online in exactly the same form on to a blog. The reporters forced to “blog” by their managing editors undoubtedly wonder that, too. By refusing to write new content for the blog they are missing the “point” of blogging entirely. It’s not about the immediacy of the coverage or the staunch objectivity of the reporting; the key to successful blogging is the immediacy of the conversation about an event. All of the credibility factors allow the blogger to transcend the limitations of text and engage readers in water cooler-style discussion as a real person and fellow observer of events. In this way bloggers build a rapport and trust with their audience.

As suggested in the literature review, blogging is in many ways a return to earlier forms of traditional media. In his 1950 book The Lonely Crowd David Riesman talks about the role of chimney-corner media in perpetuating and modifying the traditions of a society. The chimney-corner was where children would be told stories, orally, that conveyed the values of their society (Riesman, Glazer, & Denney 1950). These were typically told by a family member or someone else from within their group who would modulate the stories to fit the comprehension level and precise web of values that the storyteller and listeners lived within. This was a key element in making this form of media so successful (Riesman et al.). Another key to success was the ability of the children to

question, criticize, or elaborate on the story, thereby becoming a participant to some extent in the telling (Riesman et al.). By knowing their audience and modulating their entries to speak to the values of that audience, as well as engaging in conversations with readers through comments and emails, bloggers participate in the successful tradition of chimney-corner media.

The particularly large gap between user- and professionally-generated entries use of transparency suggests it may be the most critical factor in maintaining a separation between the two groups in credibility polls. Although user-generated entries always came out ahead, the frequencies of all the other factors were roughly equitable, especially once word count was adjusted for. Since transparency is not specifically forbidden by journalistic values it seems that journalists simply don't think it's very important. When transparency does occur in newspapers it is generally segregated from other content in a column or blog specifically dedicated to discussing the behind-the-scenes activities of producing the paper (Nemeth, 2007). While some papers are recognizing that transparency has a place in the news room, it seems they are reticent to fully integrate it. By maintaining separate columns and blogs for transparency they acknowledge it without embracing the "lifestyle". User-generated bloggers, on the other hand, don't have the rigid preconceived notions about what should and should not constitute reporting and so they integrate transparency into their research, reporting, and commenting practices, as one would when collaborating and discussing with friends

Although there appeared to be effects from the topic of the entries it was difficult to determine exactly what they were or what caused them. When comparing credibility factors by entry both groups used the most when covering Haiti. Once word count was removed as a variable the trends were clearer with “State of the Union” and “Economic Crisis” being the outliers for total average credibility factors used. This may have been because they were the most recent events, with the State of the Union address on Jan. 27, 2010, and the appointment of Ben Bernanke to a second term as Chairman of the Federal Reserve on Jan. 28, 2010. Although Toyota also had news events during the week by amending its recalls on Jan. 27 and 29, 2010, the difference may have been in the anticipation. Like “Obama Administration” and “Haiti Earthquake” the topic of Toyota was surrounded by much speculation and discussion, but no one knew more recalls were coming. In the cases of the State of the Union address and the appointment of Bernanke, these were highly anticipated events and the sampling window covers both the pre-event speculation and post-event discussion. This may be why those two topics don’t have the same credibility factor percentages as the others.

There was some effect of topic because both groups showed the same word count trend (with the exception of user-generated blogs on “Obama Administration”). Interestingly, the bloggers did not devote the most words to “State of the Union,” which is the news story that claimed the most attention in the mainstream press for that week. They used the most words when discussing “Haiti Earthquake,” the third most common topic in the mainstream press. The bloggers third ranked topic, based on word count, was “Toyota

Recall,” which placed last in the mainstream press. I once again tried to find a relationship between the recentness of the event and the number of words devoted to it, but none was apparent. I think that within the limits of this study it can’t be determined what caused this effect, but future studies should further research it. The variance between bloggers’ word count ranking and mainstream press news hole rankings could be particularly important.

A correlation of bias with the credibility factors for each entry coded in this study revealed no correlation between the two. When the professionally- and user-generated correlations were charted separately they showed correlations of approximately equal strength in opposite directions. While the average frequency of bias per entry was very similar between the two groups (6.93 for professionally-generated blogs versus 8.40 for user-generated blogs) the average frequency of credibility factors per entry was much lower in the professionally generated blogs (5.67 versus 14.20). The lack of a correlation means that bias is not an obvious candidate for another credibility factor. However, historical research and popular belief strongly suggested there should have been a negative correlation between the two which was not seen. Bias appears to be in an in-between stage currently, neither building nor breaking down credibility. Researchers should continue to monitor its effect on online credibility.

A full-scale manifest content analysis is needed to verify and examine the trends suggested in this exploratory study. Researchers should look for the effects of self- and

information-disclosure as the most common and potentially most influential credibility factors. Transparency should also be examined as, potentially, a uniquely influential factor for maintaining the gap between user- and professionally-generated blogs. Topical effects on word count and the credibility factors need to be further explored. Bias appears to be somewhere in between destroying credibility, as traditionally believed, and creating credibility, as some researchers predict it may soon do. Researchers should continue to monitor it. In the fast paced online environment it undoubtedly won't take long for the trends to become clearer.

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APPENDIX A

CODE BOOK

Directions for coders

1. Read the entire story once before you code the sources.
2. Work slowly and frequently consult the instructions.
3. If you take a long break from coding, review the instructions before you resume work.
4. Record all information on the appropriate code sheet in numerical form (except blog name and hyperlink).
5. In addition to reading these directions you should consult the attached coding example before you begin work.
6. If you cannot successfully code a blog entry set it aside for later consideration.

What to code

Code everything on the page that is a product of the blogger/author. This includes personal biographies and hyperlinks provided by the author (note: do not follow the hyperlinks to outside sites and code that information, just note that the link was made available.)

DO follow hyperlinks and code the information you find if the link leads to:

1. A personal biography

2. Site traffic information including page views and unique IP hits, or production information

What not to code

Content not placed on the site by the blogger/author. This includes advertisements, automatically generated post histories, automatically generated suggested topics, and quotes or excerpts from other sources.

Coding word count

Word count will be determined by Microsoft Word 2007 and measured from the title of a post through all of the author's updates within two days after the initial posting. Only those comments published by the author will be counted. They will be counted from the beginning of the comment to the end. Omit quotes and excerpts of greater than 25 words that are not original to the author. Additionally, if there is an author profile or information the counts as transparency (see section on coding for transparency) on the page or linked from it the words in that area will count too in the manner: from the title or sub title through the end of the section.

Coding for self-disclosure

Self-disclosure must be more than just a name. Information about profession, family, hobbies, daily activities etc. when it is NOT pertinent to the primary topic at hand counts whether it is in a concise box located on the same page as the post, a hyperlinked profile,

or within the text of an entry. The information must be on or linked from the page where entries are posted. Information revealed in the text of an article, even if it is redundant with information in a profile or box, will be counted each time it is mentioned, once per item. When information in profile boxes or pages is in list form (ex: “Interests: skiing, music, [...]”) only count the category once, not each individual item.

Coding for information-disclosure

Count one instance for revealing sources either through links, naming the source, or another explicit description that would make the original article/interview/etc. easy to find. Multiple quotations or reference to the same interview do not count as multiple instances.

Coding for transparency

One instance should be counted for each occurrence of statistics about the blog’s readership (page views), interview transcripts, videos, or tapes, author’s notes, and other similar nuts-and-bolts information about the information gathering or publication.

Information must be on or linked from the page where entries appear. When information on a site statistics page is in list or table form only count the category or table once, not each individual item.

Coding for timeliness

One instance for each update of a previously posted entry to add new information and comment by the author. Each edit of an existing post or posting of a comment within two days after the original post is one instance of timeliness.

Coding for bias

One instance counted for every time the author admits bias, makes an assertion of opinion, reports facts with obvious slant, or uses exaggerated or sarcastic language to influence a readers' view to match theirs. When admissions of bias are located in profile boxes or pages in list form (ex: "Published books: The Politics of Libertarianism, Why Obama is Failing, [...]") only count the category once, not each individual item.

Example of a coded blog post

Cash for clunkers is Obamanomics in microcosm

Aug 3, 2009 12:58 EDT

Great Recession | Obamanomics

Think of "cash for clunkers" as a sort of **bizarro twin**¹ of that "**bucks for banks**"² program from last autumn. You know, the one where Congress authorized \$700 billion to keep financial clunkers on Wall Street up and running.

Thank goodness³ the automobile version won't be nearly as expensive for taxpayers, consisting of a mere \$1 billion in incentives for individuals to trade in their old gas guzzlers for new, (at least slightly) more fuel-efficient vehicles.

And giving away free money turned out to be so **wildly and unexpectedly popular**⁴ that the House quickly passed a bill giving away another \$2 billion before heading out on August holiday. Now it's up to the Senate to pass a similar extension before it **takes the rest of the month off**⁵.

It shouldn't⁶. Although there's no doubt the program encouraged a mad rush into automobile dealer showrooms, what will be the net effect of the **deluge**⁷ once it subsides? **Probably not much**⁸.

An analysis by Macroeconomic Advisers¹ forecasts that the program will affect only the timing of car sales, not total sales: "In particular, we expect that roughly half of the 250,000 in new sales would have occurred in the months following the conclusion of the program, and the other half would have occurred during the program period anyway. Therefore, we do not expect a boost to industry-wide production (or GDP) in response to this program."

In other words, the program gets much of its juice via **stealing**⁹ car sales from the near future rather than generating additional demand. In practice, it works much like tax policies and subsidies to encourage women to have more children. Studies have found that women may have children earlier than they would otherwise, but they don't necessarily have more kids.

The rebate program is also emblematic of the administration's **unwise**¹⁰ approaches to economic policymaking. It borrows money to generate economic activity, which in effect borrows growth from the future, since eventually that loan will have to be paid back through higher taxes.

It picks and promotes a particular industry in a sort of small-scale industrial policy. It also places an emphasis on consumer spending as a route to renewed prosperity over greater investment — and isn't that how the American economy got in trouble in the first place?¹¹

And for those reasons, cash for clunkers isn't just a whimsically¹² named government program that helps automakers clear out some inventory and generate a bit of quick cash flow, while also making average Americans feel they're finally getting their bailout. If that's all it was, cash for clunkers wouldn't be such a big deal. Rather, it is evidence that no one in Washington is learning any economic lessons¹³. And that is a very big deal¹⁴.

August 3rd, 2009

3:13 pm GMT¹

[...] Read the original here: James Pethokoukis » Blog Archive » Cash for clunkers is ...

[...]

- Posted by James Pethokoukis » Blog Archive » Cash for clunkers is ... | Webmaster Tools

Author Profile

James Pethokoukis is the Money & Politics columnist and blogger for Reuters where he covers the nexus of Washington and Wall Street¹⁵.

Previously he was the economics columnist and business editor at U.S.News & World Report magazine¹⁶. Pethokoukis is also an official CNBC contributor¹⁷ and appears frequently on that network's Kudlow Report, Power Lunch, and The Call shows¹⁸. In

addition, he has appeared numerous times on MSNBC, Fox News Channel, Fox Business Network, CNN, and Nightly Business Report on PBS¹⁹.

A 1989 graduate of Northwestern University¹ where he double majored in Soviet politics and American history² and a 1991 graduate of the Medill School of Journalism³,

Pethokoukis is a 2002 Jeopardy! champion⁴. Pethokoukis can be reached at

james.pethokoukis@thomsonreuters.com⁵ (Pethokoukis, 2009).

Table 1

Code Book Example Coded Blog Frequencies

| Author name | Word count | Transparency frequency | Timeliness frequency | Self-disclosure frequency | Information-disclosure frequency | Total | Bias frequency | Total with bias |
|-------------------|------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| James Pethokoukis | 626 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 19 | 26 |

APPENDIX B

LIST OF BLOG ENTRIES

Blog entries used in pilot study

- (2009, July 31). McCaskill won't vote to give clunkers more money. Retrieved from <http://blogs.usatoday.com/onpolitics/2009/07/mccaskill-wont-vote-to-give-clunkers-more-money.html>
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USWeapon. (2009, Aug 4). So how much is that old rusted government worth?
Retrieved from <http://standupforamerica.wordpress.com/2009/08/04/so-how-much-is-that-old-rusted-government-worth/>

Blog entries used to test intracoder reliability

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APPENDIX C

RAW DATA

Table 2
Professionally-generated Blog Frequencies

| Event | Author name | Word count | Transparency frequency | Timeliness frequency | Self-disclosure frequency | Information-disclosure frequency | Total | Bias frequency | Total with bias |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| State of the Union | Amanda St. Amand | 323 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 9 |
| | Editorial board | 295 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 13 | 18 |
| | Tom Benning | 159 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| | Totals | 777 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 18 | 18 | 34 |
| | Averages | 259 | 0 | .67 | 2.33 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 11.33 |
| | Editorial board | 321 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 16 | 23 |
| Economic Crisis | Mike Doyle | 157 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| | David Goldstein | 342 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| | Totals | 820 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 10 | 26 | 36 |
| | Averages | 273.33 | .33 | 0 | 2.33 | .67 | 3.33 | 8.67 | 12 |

Table 2 continued

| Event | Author name | Word count | Transparency frequency | Timeliness frequency | Self-disclosure frequency | Information-disclosure frequency | Total | Bias frequency | Total with bias |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Haiti Earthquake | Jim Sanders | 224 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| | Dave Rosenthal | 235 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 4 | 10 | 5 | 15 |
| | Mike Bianchi | 658 | 0 | 0 | 6 | | 6 | 19 | 25 |
| | Totals | 1117 | 1 | 0 | 13 | 6 | 20 | 25 | 45 |
| | Averages | 372.33 | .33 | 0 | 4.33 | 2 | 6.67 | 8.33 | 15 |
| Obama Administration | Jennifer J. Foster | 373 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 13 | 19 |
| | John Stark | 356 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 15 |
| | William Gibson | 346 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 10 |
| | Totals | 1075 | 1 | 1 | 11 | 7 | 20 | 24 | 44 |
| | Averages | 358.33 | .33 | .33 | 3.67 | 2.33 | 6.67 | 8 | 14.67 |
| Toyota Recall | Steve Rosen | 327 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Jarrett Rush | 277 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 11 | 5 | 16 |
| | Andrea K. Walker | 341 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| | Totals | 845 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 17 | 11 | 28 |
| | Averages | 281.67 | 0 | 0 | 5.67 | 0 | 5.67 | 3.67 | 9.33 |
| Totals | | 4634 | 3 | 3 | 55 | 24 | 85 | 104 | 187 |
| Aver... | | 308.93 | .2 | .2 | 3.67 | 1.6 | 5.67 | 6.93 | 12.47 |

Table 3

User-generated Blog Frequencies

| Event | Author name | Word count | Transparency frequency | Timeliness frequency | Self-disclosure frequency | Information-disclosure frequency | Total | Bias frequency | Total with bias |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| State of the Union | Jeanne Devon | 749 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 1 | 16 | 8 | 24 |
| | Yves Smith | 348 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 12 | 15 |
| | Will Folks | 353 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 24 | 27 |
| | Totals | 1450 | 3 | 0 | 17 | 2 | 22 | 44 | 66 |
| | Averages | 483.33 | 1 | 0 | 5.67 | .67 | 7.33 | 14.67 | 22 |
| Economic Crisis | Jennifer S. Taub | 766 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 13 | 22 |
| | Tony Phynillas | 1076 | 9 | 0 | 17 | 1 | 27 | 4 | 31 |
| | Josh Richman | 259 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 5 | 17 | 3 | 20 |
| | Totals | 2101 | 11 | 2 | 32 | 8 | 53 | 20 | 73 |
| | Averages | 700.33 | 3.67 | .67 | 10.67 | 2.67 | 17.67 | 6.67 | 24.33 |
| Haiti Earthquake | Casey Kazan | 852 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 14 |
| | Christian Sinclair | 1197 | 6 | 3 | 18 | 10 | 37 | 16 | 53 |
| | Josh Richman | 231 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 2 | 12 | 3 | 15 |
| | Totals | 2280 | 17 | 3 | 29 | 14 | 63 | 19 | 82 |
| | Averages | 760 | 5.67 | 1 | 9.67 | 4.67 | 21 | 6.33 | 27.33 |

Table 3 continued

| Event | Author name | Word count | Transparency frequency | Timeliness frequency | Self-disclosure frequency | Information-disclosure frequency | Total | Bias frequency | Total with bias |
|----------------------|----------------|------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Obama Administration | Rob | 176 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 11 | 13 |
| | Van Helsing | 386 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| | Scott Nance | 659 | 3 | 0 | 16 | 4 | 23 | 1 | 24 |
| | Totals | 1221 | 5 | 0 | 16 | 11 | 32 | 19 | 51 |
| | Averages | 407 | 1.67 | 0 | 5.33 | 3.67 | 10.67 | 6.33 | 17 |
| Toyota Recall | Flexo | 932 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 18 | 8 | 26 |
| | Matt Hardgrave | 445 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 11 | 13 | 24 |
| | NateTherGrate | 402 | 5 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 14 | 3 | 17 |
| | Totals | 1779 | 6 | 2 | 19 | 16 | 43 | 24 | 67 |
| | Averages | 593 | 2 | .67 | 6.33 | 5.33 | 14.33 | 8 | 22.33 |
| Totals | | 8831 | 42 | 7 | 113 | 51 | 213 | 126 | 339 |
| Aver... | | 588.73 | 2.8 | .47 | 7.53 | 3.4 | 14.2 | 8.4 | 22.6 |

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Kaitlyn Shea Drinkwater

Professional Address: c/o Dr. Dave A. Louis
Texas A&M University Honors Program
114 Henderson Hall
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843

Education: B.S., University Studies – Honors, Texas A&M
University, May 2010
Honors Undergraduate Research Fellow